

# Blaming the jury

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The following editorial appeared in the Chicago Tribune on Sunday, July 10:

Somewhere along the way, the American viewing public mistook the Casey Anthony trial for an episode of "American Idol." If the audience had been allowed to vote, she'd be on her way to Florida's death row.

Instead, she'll be released within days, acquitted of first-degree murder of her 2-year-old daughter. She'll be free to sell her story, have another baby, go on breathing - all to the loud dismay of the armchair jurors who thought the prosecution gave a better performance than the defense. The verdict from the couch: The jury blew it.

CNN legal analyst Nancy Grace called the jury "kooky." Fox News host Bill O'Reilly's post-verdict recap was headlined, "Dumb beyond a reasonable doubt." Commenters on Internet news sites have called the jurors cowards, idiots and worse, questioning whether their brief deliberations - it took them only 11 hours - constitute a good-faith effort and suggesting they might have reached a different verdict if Anthony weren't attractive/young/white/female. "How can they sleep at night?" is a frequent entry.

The shrill reaction led the trial judge to seal the jurors' names out of concern for their safety. And they'll never eat chili in Clearwater again: A sign in the window at Skyline Chili there reads: "Pinellas County jurors NOT welcome!!!"

A few jurors have tried to explain.

"In our country ... we have to prove it," Jennifer Ford, aka Juror No. 3, told ABC News. "You can't just be like, 'Yeah, that really looks bad. Smells bad.'" Jurors, she said, were "sick to our stomach" over the verdict.

Juror No. 2, who asked not to be named, told the St. Petersburg Times that if the verdict had been determined based on emotions, "she was done."

"I wish we had more evidence to put her away," he said. "I truly do."

Two alternate jurors who sat through all the testimony said they agreed with the verdicts reached by the other 12. "They really listened to this case and kept an open mind," one said.

Open minds were hard to come by after three years of sensational coverage that began when Anthony's mother called 911 to report that her granddaughter was missing and her daughter's car reeked of death. Worried that an impartial jury couldn't be found in Orange County, where the Anthonys lived, the judge brought in jurors from Pinellas County.

How can those who watched the trial on TV see things so differently from those who watched from the jury box? For starters, the jurors had to swear their minds weren't made up. During the trial, they weren't allowed to discuss testimony or to watch or read news accounts about it. Home viewers got live coverage, complete with "analysis," plus a daily barrage of she-did-it commentary. In the court of public opinion, Anthony was convicted long before the trial's first gavel.

Jurors also saw things the home viewers didn't. Unlike those watching on TV or the computer, jurors couldn't change the channel, chat on Facebook, answer the phone or otherwise go about their lives. How many people watched every minute of testimony from their recliners? How many watched every minute and nothing else?

It's easy to understand why the verdict is so unsatisfying. A toddler is dead, nobody is being held accountable, and Anthony sure looked guilty on television. But the case was tried in the courtroom, not the living room, and the evidence came up short.

Stop blaming the jurors. They had someone's life in their hands. The rest of us were holding the remote.

Read more: <http://www.tri-cityherald.com/2011/07/11/1563711/blaming-the-jury.html#ixzz1Rw8ubWw1>